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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND EDUCATION MINISTER YULI TAMIR
DISCUSS "PEACE CURRICULUM," NOVEMBER INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. The Ambassador called on Minister of Education Yuli Tamir (Labor) August 21 to discuss ways the Education Ministry could support the peace process. Tamir agreed with the Ambassador that it was important to develop a "peace curriculum" to promote tolerance and mutual understanding. She hoped to speak soon with PA Education Minister Lamis Alami, but had so far been unsuccessful in her attempts to secure a meeting. Tamir said she also wanted to help "prepare the ground" for the November international conference by developing ideas for student exchanges and educational initiatives that could be presented as deliverables for any economic component of the conference. Tamir said she was standing firm in the face of strong criticism over recent decisions to add reference to the "Nakba" and Green Line in some Israeli textbooks, although she doubted whether such reforms could survive without the support -- which was wavering under pressure -- of PM Olmert.

Tamir agreed to continue working to ease the burden on Palestinian students including those who are forced to cross checkpoints to reach their schools each day. END SUMMARY.

Engaging PA on "Peace Curriculum"

¶12. (C) The Ambassador noted that during her last trip to the region, Secretary Rice met for the first time with the Palestinian Authority Cabinet in Ramallah, including PA Education Minister Lamis Alami. The Secretary's party was impressed with the professionalism and quality of PM Fayyad's new government, and the USG believes the Palestinian ministers could support the peace process by engaging with their Israeli counterparts. On education, the U.S. believes it would be helpful for both sides to support peace by developing a "peace curriculum" to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

¶13. (C) Tamir agreed with the need to educate children for peace, and said she was ready to meet with her Palestinian counterpart at any time. She had been trying to arrange a meeting with Education Minister Alami through a Palestinian associate, but had so far received no response. Tamir suggested that perhaps Alami was still consolidating her authority within the ministry and was not yet ready to meet with an Israeli. Tamir understood that Alami was in a difficult position with Hamas refusing to cede control over education, especially in Gaza, and hoped that Alami would soon feel strong enough to meet with her. The Ambassador thanked Tamir for her efforts and urged her not to give up on engaging with Alami, even if it was only over the phone or through an intermediary. Tamir replied that she was flexible and would accept any approach from Alami. Perhaps they could start with contacts between lower-level officials in their ministries, she said.

Preparing the Ground for November International Conference

¶4. (C) Tamir said she wanted to use her position as Education Minister to support the peace process and to foster interaction and mutual understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. She hoped to help "prepare the ground" for the international conference in November and said she would welcome any suggestion from the U.S. "I am ready to do whatever I can to help," she said, "especially if it helps the children." Tamir said she had told PM Olmert that if the conference involves an economic component, then she would like to contribute by "doing something with youth exchanges and education." The Ambassador welcomed Tamir's efforts and reiterated the importance of developing curricula that teach children to value peace.

¶5. (C) Tamir asked what the U.S. was expecting from the November conference, and stressed that it would be important to get the expectations right. Camp David aimed too high and left people disillusioned. We should avoid making the same mistake in November. The Ambassador agreed, and said people needed to understand that November would be the beginning of the process, not the ending. The Ambassador said it was too early to tell what the outcome would be, but on the economic front, we hoped to at least make enough progress at the Israeli-Palestinian Business Council meeting in October to present tangible results in November.

Israeli Textbook Reforms: An-Nakba and the Green Line

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¶6. (C) Turning to the subject of Israeli textbooks, the Ambassador said he wanted to congratulate Tamir on her recent courageous decision to distribute a new textbook to Arab elementary schools that uses the term "An-Nakba" ("The Catastrophe") to describe Arab attitudes to Israel's War of Independence. Tamir thanked the Ambassador for his support and said she would stand by her decision, as well as her earlier (December 2006) controversial decision to include maps showing the Green Line in Israeli textbooks. "It is important for people to understand that the narrative they are telling themselves is not always everyone else's narrative," she said. Tamir said she had received a great deal of support from the Arab sector, but had also suffered heavy criticism from Jewish opponents. She said she was not bothered by the criticism "because everyone knows I come from the Left and I am used to it." However, she said she was also coming under increasing pressure from the Prime Minister, who was also under pressure on the issue, to discard the recent textbook reforms. She feared she would not be able to maintain these changes without the PM's support. "I told him (PM Olmert) that he was going to give back the whole territory unilaterally and now he's worried about one sentence in my textbooks," she said.

Restrictions on the Movement of Palestinian Students

¶7. (C) The Ambassador asked whether, in the spirit of promoting peace through education, Tamir could do anything to help with the issue of Gazan students currently unable to continue their education because of the GOI's refusal to grant permission for them to study in the West Bank. Tamir said she had already "tried very hard" to help them, but that the security services were very firm in their refusal to allow the students into the West Bank. She said she would keep trying, but could not foresee any progress in the near term. The Ambassador also asked whether there was anything Tamir could do to help ease the daily burden of some 14,000

Palestinian students in the West Bank who need to cross the security barrier every day to reach their schools, an ordeal that entailed long and often humiliating waits at checkpoints. Tamir responded that, as with the Gazan students, the security forces had been unwilling to budge on the issue. She pointed out that the age group of the students made them high-risk in the minds of the security forces. The Ambassador suggested that maybe the GOI could issue identity cards to affected students to facilitate passage through checkpoints. Tamir agreed to look into the idea. The Ambassador also expressed concerns about constraints on Palestinian schooling in Area C and denial of visas and work permits to expatriate staff for Palestinian universities. Tamir was sympathetic, but indicated such issues were beyond her control.

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